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SUBJECT: YOUNG MEN IN GRENADA NOT MAKING THE GRADE

Summary

11. (U) Throughout the Eastern Caribbean young men are in crisis. Few are pursuing higher education and many are facing difficulties finding gainful employment. By contrast, young women in the Caribbean are moving rapidly ahead of their male counterparts: nearly 70 percent of college students in the region are female, and females are increasingly dominating professional employment opportunities. Grenada offers an illustrative case in point.

USAID and Peace Corps are responding with programs specifically targeting employability skills for at-risk young people -- programs that should dovetail perfectly with anticipated CBSI-related programming in future fiscal years.
End Summary.

Young Men Not Making the Grade While Women Move Ahead

12. (U) During a recent two week TDY in Grenada, Poloff heard repeatedly from Embassy interlocutors about the dismal state of young males in Grenadian society. The Peace Corps Country Director pointed out that 17 of the 19 Permanent Secretaries (senior civil servants) in government ministries are now held by women, and the Chamber of Commerce and the Grenada Investment Corporation are both run by women. In higher education, the picture is largely the same: 60 percent of the students at the community college are women. Women even form the majority in traditionally male-dominated fields of study such as engineering and construction management. Union leaders confirm that in many formerly mostly male professions such as construction and masonry, many of the younger workers are female. Union leaders complain that young men are simply not coming to work with a proper work ethic, while women are coming to the workplace engaged, educated, and with the proper work ethic to succeed. One social service director pointed out that many young men seem content to take odd jobs and live off their girlfriends' salaries. They are in his words, "becoming bums and parasites." Young women, on the other hand, are getting good jobs, moving ahead in professional careers and buying their own houses. Others pointed out that, with the decline of industrial agriculture as well as the decline in construction over the last few years, there are fewer jobs for unskilled laborers. Most young Grenadian men do graduate from high school, but lack the grades or motivation to go on to college. Many of them are drifting into petty crime, drug dealing, gambling and alcohol abuse. The problem of "at risk youth" has become a serious one throughout the region.

13. (U) According to some Grenadians, one of the key factors

contributing to the dismal state of young men in Grenada is that, during the revolution of 1979-1983, many legal and other social barriers that kept women from competing were dismantled and efforts were made to dramatically increase female professional opportunities. Those efforts continued even after the revolution ended, uprooting the male-dominated social order and giving women new opportunities to compete. Twenty years later, women have pulled ahead of their male counterparts in almost all fields. Not only are women now the majority of college students, but female students in high school and college outperform their male counterparts academically, with the top students typically all being women.

USAID Program Targets At-Risk Youth

¶4. (U) In recognition of the problems facing youth at risk, particularly young men, USAID has recently begun a new project in Grenada (as well as in Antigua) that offers at-risk youth, both male and female, competency-based training, complemented with life skills training aimed at increasing their chances to secure and retain jobs in sectors of the economy with a growing demand for labor. The target group is vulnerable young men and women ages 17-25, who did not complete secondary-level education and are unemployed due to a lack of rudimentary employability skills. This Caribbean Empowerment Youth Program is a two-year, US\$750,000 project being implemented in both countries by the International Youth Foundation, in partnership in Grenada with the T.A. Marryshow Community College. The initiative

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will provide 250 vulnerable youth with entry-level employability skills (technical vocation and life skills) complemented by a private sector work internship. The Grenada Chamber of Commerce is an important and energetic partner in this project. Employment training courses will be offered in the following fields: tour guide, food processing, craft production, dining room and bar service, marine service, vegetable and condiment production, apiculture, hair care, landscaping, steel work, garment-making and child care. Once the training is completed, graduates will receive individualized job placement support. Additional USAID programs for at-risk youth are being planned to be launched across the Eastern Caribbean during calendar year 2010 and beyond.

Comment

¶5. (U) The phenomenon of women outperforming men is not limited to Grenada. In Barbados, nearly 70 percent of the undergraduates at the University of the West Indies, as well as at the community college, are women. Similar patterns appear in the other islands of the Eastern Caribbean, suggesting that the problems have common roots in the social structure and economic picture in all of the countries in the region. Programs such as the USAID initiative, as well as some Peace Corps programs in the region that target at-risk youth (who are mostly males), will help meet a very real sociological need in these societies faced with rapidly changing economic circumstances. These programs, which all heads of government in the region have been urgently seeking, could be significantly expanded in future fiscal years under the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative. Failure to address the challenges posed by at-risk youth will lead to a continued rise in violent crime that could undermine the tourism-based economies in these vulnerable countries.

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